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Seeker Sensitive Blah Blah Blah

Luke 9:51-62

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- **When churches look to their people for money to support ministry, there are several kinds of programs that are used. We use the *Consecration Sunday* approach because the philosophy seems to us to be biblical. Some churches use a method called 'every member canvas.' In this method, a team of people are trained to visit each and every member of the church and talk to them both about current and future ministries, and seek from the people a commitment for the upcoming year. As you might expect, the people visited come up with many reasonable and convincing excuses for why they will not be able to contribute to the life of the church of which they have been a part. In one church, a veteran retired minister was brought in to help with that year's every member canvas, and he brought with him a single sheet entitled 'Excuses.' On it were listed the most obvious excuses people use, and some typical responses the visiting team might use in response. But at the bottom of the sheet, in bold letters, were these words: All excuses should be treated as a sign of insufficient commitment.**

- **Jesus is traveling in the first section of the Scripture from Galilee to Jerusalem, a three day journey by foot. He and his disciples, like many others, are going to a festival, and as it happens, much of the travel time passes through the region of Israel called Samaria.**
  - **Back in 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered the northern ten tribes of Israel. Unlike the Romans, who installed their own military garrisons in conquered lands, the Assyrian approach to a conquered people was to transfer the leaders of the conquered country, including the trades people, to another city in the conquered empire, indeed to set them up with businesses intact, with the assumption that other than learning a new language, they would be able to prosper and forget about the country they came from, and thus be unable to mount a revolt or seek to return. So, after 722 BC, the people who were the leaders of the northern ten tribes of Israel were mostly taken elsewhere, and in their place came nationals from other conquered countries. These newcomers intermarried with those of the northern ten tribes who were left and the resulting collection of people were called Samaritans.**
  - **Now, the Samaritans disliked the Jews, who worshipped Yahweh God in Jerusalem, and mostly the two people had little to do with each other. But the dislike was intense enough so that Samaritans tended not to want to support those Jews who happened to live north of Samaria, who would seek to cross Samaritan territory in order to get to Jerusalem for the larger feast days.**

- **I suspect the disciples were feeling pretty full of themselves. They had received power and authority from Jesus to demonstrate the kingdom of God by casting out demons, healing the sick, and performing miracles of nature. And they had accomplished these things in the name of Jesus. So when confronted by the hostility of the Samaritans, two of the**

disciples suggested they rain fire down from heaven upon these hostile Samaritans, ala Elijah and the priests of Baal. I think Jesus responds in three ways:

- **There are always some who refuse the Gospel**
- **You need to face hostility with patience**
- **You must keep your eyes on your goal = proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God**

- **While en route to Jerusalem, Jesus comes upon three would-be disciples. The first says he would follow Jesus anywhere, but Jesus tells him he doesn't want (or need) fanatics = you must think about what this means;**
  - **No home**
  - **No security**
  - **A life on the move**
- **The second guy also wants to follow Jesus, but wants to first bury his dead. Jesus tells him there is no time to waste.**
- **The third guy also wants to follow Jesus, but wants to say goodbye to his family. Jesus tells this one that if he is going to follow Jesus he needs to follow Jesus - not follow his own idea about what it means to follow.**

- **The most obviously successful churches in America today, at least in terms of numerical attendance and finances, are those that cater to seekers. Seekers are people who are presumably seeking after God, or in some way open to God. These churches are drawing seekers to hear the Gospel. How? Mostly, by making church easy and accessible:**
  - **Toning down religious language**
  - **Making worship a weekly entertainment**
  - **Building fountains and espresso bars and juice bars and day care centers**
  - **Soft-speaking doctrine**
  - **Surveying what people WANT and then CATERING to these wants**
- **The church thinks it is in a buyer's market - that the 'seekers' have the power, so 'the church' has been offering faith and discipleship packaged attractively to catch these seekers.**
- **This is a worrisome trend. To be sure, by following the proven marketing strategies of successful American businesses, many churches have accurately identified the wants of the people in their neighborhoods, and have striven to meet these wants with solutions that have had the effect of drawing in people. Yet, as they have focused on the goal of drawing people in, they have usually and often changed the nature of the call Jesus makes upon all of us.**
  - **Jesus makes discipleship:**
  - **Difficult**
  - **Costly**
  - **Demanding**
    - **"Jesus doesn't ask us to choose him over the worst but over the best"**
    - **I would argue that the heart of the Christian faith can be summarized by two words - submission and obedience, and that these are the two words that trouble most people today. So, shall we trouble them with these words, or cater to their wants?**

- **The question can also be put this way: "Why does Jesus make discipleship hard?"**
  - **Jesus cares for us so much that he wants us to know how important it is to give ourselves in such a way that nothing is left over**

- **Jesus loves us enough to be honest**
- **Jesus keeps saying that following him may cost us everything we hold dear**

- **Let me make it even simpler (Tom hands out signs to persons in the front rows and asks them to stand and point the words on the signs to the congregation, in this order:**
  - **#1 "We believe God really exists"**
  - **#2 "We believe God created us"**
  - **#3 "We believe we are whole when …"**
  - **#4 "We follow God totally"**
  - **#5 "Do you want to do this?"**

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